

Developing a Cooperative Security Framework

March 24, 1980

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is a statement by Harold H. Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on March 24, 1980.

Developments in recent months have focused attention on the Persian Gulf, southwest Asia, and Indian Ocean areas with new intensity. Our discussion today provides another of those opportunities which I have been privileged to share with this subcommittee to step back and to develop the conceptual framework within which U.S. interests are being pursued in this critical area.

The President himself in his State of the Union address defined three basic developments that have helped to shape our challenges within this region:

- The steady growth and increased projection of Soviet military power beyond its own borders;
- The overwhelming dependence of the Western democracies on oil supplies from the Middle East; and
- The press of social and religious and economic and political change in the many nations of the developing world—exemplified by the revolution in Iran.

As the President said, "Each of these factors is important in its own right. Each interacts with the others. All must be faced together. . . ."

The national attention now being directed at this area requires repetition of two fundamental points that have been stated frequently in our discussions about the Middle East and southwest Asia over the past 2 years:

First. More significant American interests come together in this part of the world than in any other area of the developing world today. These interests are being further challenged today by the actions of the Soviet Union.

Second. In one of the fastest changing areas of the world, the issue for U.S. policymakers is not how to arrest change but to understand its causes and to decide how to work with the governments of the area to channel it in constructive directions.

Our purpose here today is to reflect on the policy that is appropriate for the United States given the importance of our interests, the threat to them, and the complex forces at work in the area itself. In a word, the point I would like you to consider is this: We will have to bring to bear a broad range of resources in cooperation with friends and allies in a sustained effort to protect our interests and to help nations in this area preserve their independence and channel change in constructive directions. Our policy cannot rest on one-track solutions but will require an intensified effort over time which will further expand and deepen our role in the region.

The Soviet Threat

A prime interest of ours in this area has long been to prevent the establishment of an adversary position which could affect our access, undermine the region's security, and lead to confrontation. In the wake of the Soviet move into Afghanistan, this has become more urgent, and it is important to define the exact nature of the problem.

The threat of overt Soviet aggression is the easiest to define.

- In Afghanistan, the threat of Soviet aggression became reality in December.

- Looking to the future, while we cannot be certain about the exact nature of Soviet intentions, we must take seriously the possibility of further Soviet moves. People in this region have long expressed concern that the Soviet objective is to achieve a path to warm waters through Baluchistan or to move to the Gulf with the additional objective of controlling the West's sources of oil. There is also concern that continuing lack of strong central authority in Iran could lead to repetition of Soviet occupation of portions of that country at the end of World War II. The growing strength of the Communist Tudeh party in Iran could contribute to a situation which the U.S.S.R. could exploit.

There are other potentially dangerous developments in the area which are less easy to characterize because the exact nature of Soviet involvement may not be clear. For instance:

- The Soviet Union has a significant presence in South Yemen. Eastern European and Cuban representatives also play significant roles there. When South Yemeni military forces invaded North Yemen a year ago, neither the Soviets nor Cubans crossed the border as far as we know, but the South Yemeni forces may have been able to do so only with that support.

- The Soviet Union has also provided significant support to other governments and liberation organizations in this area. The issue is not whether the Soviets control those governments or organizations. The issue is whether the Soviets have positioned themselves to take advantage for their own purposes of situations in which the interests of both parties coincide. In many such circumstances the Soviet role will be apparent, but the degree of direct Soviet responsibility will be more difficult to determine.

- A permanent Soviet domination of Afghanistan would enhance Soviet capabilities for support of subversion and other forms of pressure on governments in the area.

- At a level even below this there are continuing Soviet efforts to penetrate various institutions in the area so as to take advantage of unstable situations where they can.

The U.S. Position and Policy

The President issued a warning in his State of the Union address when he said:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

The question at the center of our discussion today is: What policy follows from that firm statement of the U.S. position? The answer, in the President's words, is: "... we are prepared to work with other countries in the region to share a cooperative security framework that respects differing values and political beliefs, yet which enhances the independence, security, and prosperity of all."

As we move forward to strengthen our relations in this region, to work with the states there to check Soviet pressure, and to foster orderly development, we must also be conscious of the need to build our approach to the complex issues of this region on a solid strategic foundation, which includes:

- A strong U.S. economy, less dependent on foreign oil;
- A vital Western alliance, capable of effective cooperation with the states of the Gulf in pursuit of common goals;
- An increased U.S. military capability to project our strength into the region in a manner designed to promote security and stability;
- A national will to press on to resolve one of the basic causes of instability in the area, the conflict between Israel and the Arabs;
- A willingness to commit resources to promote the survival and independence of governments and peoples in the region who seek to work constructively with us toward the goals of peace and human dignity.

By pulling these strands together into a coherent strategy, we can provide strong, resolute, and understanding leadership which will give compelling reasons for most of the nations of the region to decide that it is in their interest to work closely with us to overcome forces of aggression, repression, and chaos.

U.S. policy must bring to bear the diplomatic, economic, and political as well as the military elements of American power. It takes into account the relationships among the nations in the area which are determined to preserve their own independence. No single American response will meet the challenge posed by the multifaceted developments in this area or can take advantage of the broad range of resources available to meet it. Our effort must be fourfold.

The Security Response

It is evident that the United States today

must take a leading role and bear a major burden for the military capability to buttress the area's security, but in so doing it is essential that we continue to work with our friends in the region and with our allies outside the region who have strong interests there. After World War II, the British played a primary role in the Gulf. In the 1950s we developed the Baghdad Pact, which later became the Central Treaty Organization. In the 1970s we found Iran to be a force for security in the region. Today the situation has changed, and these practical solutions are no longer available.

As the President made clear in his State of the Union address, we are increasing our defense effort and improving our capability to deploy U.S. military forces rapidly to distant areas. The United States has increased and strengthened its own naval presence in the Indian Ocean, maintaining two carrier battle groups there since late last year and ordering a Marine amphibious unit to join them later this month. We are also discussing with some nations in the area the use of certain naval and air facilities in connection with current fleet activities. We will preserve our standby capability to use the necessary additional military force to assist threatened countries in the region in case of need. We will choose our means carefully to assure that U.S. actions do not generate local political liabilities that would detract from the effectiveness of our overall effort.

We have also pursued our military supply relationships with a number of nations in the area. These contribute not only to their own self-defense capabilities, but to their feeling of stability and their willingness to share in the common security effort.

The strength of the response to the challenge will lie both in the commitment of the nations of the region to it and in the breadth of the actions of others. In addition to our building the military deterrence which I have mentioned, our continuing objective is to make the Soviet Union pay a concrete price for its aggression in Afghanistan. While this invasion continues, we and the other nations of the world should not conduct business with the U.S.S.R. as usual. We have imposed a number of economic and other sanctions, and sought a similar effort by our allies. These actions do not stand alone. They must be viewed by the Soviets together with the condemnation of the overwhelming majority of nations and the resistance of the Afghan people themselves. We are hoping thus to help press the Soviets to a realistic reassessment of their position and to withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan.

The Political Response

The United States seeks a constructive relationship with each nation in the area in the preservation of its own independence. We seek no special advantage for ourselves. The United States has worked hard over the years with many of the governments in this area to help them bring about economic and social progress. Their development has been among our most important objectives because we have felt that helping those governments to provide fuller participation for their people in shaping their future is essential in human as well as political terms.

In dealing with all the internal pressures for change that stem from modern technology and education, from industrialization, and from large oil revenues, traditional governments across this area are also struggling with the question of how to broaden the sense of political participation of their citizenry in determining the directions their countries take.

For example, one of the issues in the Iranian revolution was the lack of broad political participation in decisions that were producing economic development which, sometimes, seemed at the cost of sensitivity to basic Islamic values. Each area leadership in its own way and in its own national context has to deal with such pressures and guide them in constructive directions.

The United States can be a trusted partner in this enterprise. The United States is well able to live with and indeed promote the diversity of many different political systems in the world. That reflects the way we operate in our own society, in which we deal with citizens from diverse racial or national backgrounds with diverse economic and social interests.

Again to cite Iran, for example: The revolution in Iran is a fact which we accept. The issue is not an American effort to turn the clock back there, but how the United States and the present government of Iran will deal with each other. In addition to the grave—indeed outrageous—human dimensions of the hostage crisis, a further question is how the United States and Iran can relate to each other and conduct business together until Iran is ready to abide by the principles of international law. If those principles were accepted and the hostages safely released, the United States would be prepared to enter into discussions at some appropriate time to determine what basis exists for a relationship between our two countries.

As the President made clear in his State of the Union address, "We believe

that there are no irreconcilable differences between us and any Islamic nation. We respect the faith of Islam, and we are ready to cooperate with all Moslem countries." I might note here parenthetically that the very taking of hostages is itself a violation of Islamic principles and tradition.

The Diplomatic Response: The Arab-Israeli Peace Process

The role which outside powers will play in this region will result in part from their ability to help with the just reduction of tensions within the region which increase its vulnerability to external exploitation.

There can be no better demonstration of the power of effective diplomacy than the success that was achieved at Camp David and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty that followed. The United States has played and will continue to play a significant role in helping to achieve a negotiated resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict which sustains the security of Israel and respects the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of every state in the area.

Resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict has long held high priority among our national objectives. Our efforts long predate the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. No foreign policy issue, as Secretary Vance said here last week, has occupied more of his and President Carter's energies and attention in the past 3 years. We shall continue to do everything in our power to help Israel and Egypt complete their peacemaking task. The security of Israel is essential to success of this effort and is in the strategic interest of the United States.

Progress toward a just and lasting peace is essential in avoiding another war, which would increase pressure for Soviet intervention, but implications for stability reach further. Unresolved, the Palestinian problem represents a cause that can ignite unrest in the Arab states and popular feeling in the Islamic and Third World states. Elements of the Palestinian movement are enmeshed in the social and political evolution of the Middle East and are factors in determining the wider future stability of the area. At the same time, it is critical that the Palestinian problem be resolved in a way that assures the security of Israel, for without that assurance there can be no peace.

The negotiations now under way were agreed at Camp David as a first step in dealing with the issues of the West Bank and Gaza. The visits of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin will provide an opportunity to review the status of those negotiations. We recognize

the importance of building on the historic accomplishments already achieved by continuing progress toward a comprehensive Middle East peace.

The Economic Response

In the Gulf and in the Arabian Peninsula, it remains our policy to encourage the governments there to cooperate in the interest of the region's security and orderly growth, and our dialogue on economic issues is an important part of our effort. We have worked closely with certain of the Gulf governments, notably Saudi Arabia, in cooperative diplomatic, economic, and security assistance efforts to bolster states in the wider region.

The Gulf oil producers welcome our progress toward an effective energy policy. Increasingly in our consultations with them, including several Cabinet-level discussions in the last 6 months, we have made progress in developing a sense of the common interest of producers and consumers in assuring orderly markets. This involves demand restraint by consuming nations and willingness of producers to provide at times more oil than their domestic income needs require.

By doing so, certain producers there have acquired large financial surpluses. They have devoted some of these resources to development assistance for others, and they have been responsible as international investors. It is important to our interests that we work ever more closely with these governments to increase their responsible participation in the international financial system and their cooperation in the pursuit of stable world financial markets and orderly growth in the developing world. We can count on these nations to assist with the cost of providing security in the area. Keeping in mind, however, that we cannot shift the burden of security of a region which is vital to us.

The history of the American relationship with Saudi Arabia and its Gulf neighbors has involved the transfer of American technology. We continue, both through government channels and the private sector, to play an important role in providing U.S. technical knowledge to help these countries develop in orderly fashion. Our commercial activities in the region have grown increasingly beneficial to our own economy and have developed into strong bonds of common interest which bolster our overall relationship with the states of this strategically vital region. We must continue as a government to facilitate, and as a nation to pursue, this key aspect of our relationship with the region.

Summary

In short, I have underscored for you here the continuing complexity and interconnection among the factors involved in developing a cooperative security framework in the area of the Persian Gulf, southwest Asia, and the Indian Ocean in response to the challenges to stability and independence there.

In the face of this challenge, our response must be many sided. It will include our own military preparedness, greater contributions and cooperation by concerned nations in the region and by our allies, and continuing active military supply relationships with the nations of the area.

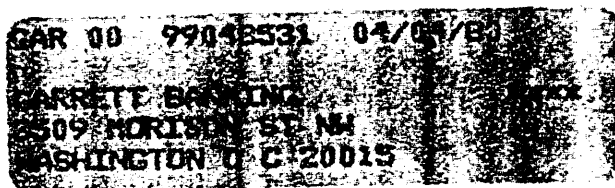
Well beyond the military, our responses must make use of our diplomatic, political, and economic influence to assist the region's governments both in developing their countries economically and in helping them preserve political stability and the area's security against indirect threats abetted or encouraged by those with an interest in generating instability. In addition, we have to manage our own economy, strengthen our own alliances, and pursue our own economic interests in the region in ways permitting us to meet the challenges to our broader interests in the area.

The principal elements of this Administration's response to the Soviet chal-

lenge in the region are in place or in the process of being put in place. But developing and maintaining that position will require sustained effort in cooperation with the governments of the region and with other world governments which have a strong interest in the security of the region. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs • Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • March 1980 • Editor: Colleen Sussman

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United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

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